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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to survey current directions and conventions in Interpreters Theatre (includes readers theatre, presentational theatre, and chamber theatre) through a literature review and to note the presence and function of these conventions in current Broadway shows that are predominantly representational. The essential conventions were found to be (1) an author- or director-introduced narrative element within the play, (2) minimal theatrical cues that invite an imaginative response from audiences, (3) a general tendency to give prominence to the words or ideas of the play, (4) a performer playing more than one character, and (5) a creative use of offstage/onstage focus. One or more of these five conventions were found to be an integral part of a large number of Broadway plays, including "Talley's Folly," "The Elephant Man," "Equus," "Strider," "Evita," and "Da" among others. The presence and importance of these conventions raises two questions for further study: Should instruction in Interpreters Theatre styles and techniques be increasingly important to a contemporary actor's training? and Where do these conventions originate, in the playwright, the designer, or the director? One thing is certain, the importance of these conventions will not diminish in the near future. (JL)

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INTERPRETERS THEATRE AS CONFIRMED BY NEW YORK PRODUCTIONS

The purpose of this article is to assess the effectiveness of Interpreters Theatre conventions in on and off-Broadway productions in recent years. To do this the authors surveyed current directions in Interpreters Theatre based on recent articles and books in the field to generate those conventions integral to Interpreters Theatre. Then the authors noted their presence in current Broadway shows which are predominantly representational, assessing how effective and integral they were to the show's critical acclaim.

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INTERPRETERS THEATRE AS CONFIRMED BY NEW YORK PRODUCTIONS

When Brooks and Bielenberg's article on Readers Theatre on the New York stage appeared nearly 16 years ago, few suspected that their comments would be prophetic.[1] Maintaining that Readers Theatre is a vital medium as evidenced by fourteen New York productions which won critical acclaim in the sixties, they cited the growing interest in the medium both in academic and professional theatre. Even later Clark Marlor's 1971 survey confirmed the viability of the form in academic theatre.[2] Finally, Walter Kerr's article alluded to the viability of the conventions as he maintained that the ten best 1979 productions asked the audience to "help make magic"--in essence to recreate a piece of imaginative literature using only minimal cues.[3] As one surveys current literature about trends and directions in readers theatre one notes that Brooks and Bielenberg's definition still remains viable: "Readers Theatre is the combining of expert readers (performers) and minimal staging with great literature in a manner that is theatrically stimulating." However, one notes subtle changes in staging techniques which directors have utilized. Seldom would one encounter an Interpreters Theatre[4] comparable to the traditional staging of Don Juan in Hell, Brecht on Brecht, The World of Carl Sandburg, or John Brown's Body which utilized the conventional aspects of Readers Theatre mentioned by Brooks

and Bielenberg: manuscripts in hand, exclusive off stage focus, minimal staging and lighting. As Kleinau wrote, many years later, "Today in Interpreters Theatre a general trend toward more fully staged and media-rich productions moves decidedly away from stools and stands and readings towards an art form more closely resembling conventional theatre.[5] More likely one encounters presentational aspects similar to those in the 1960 productions incorporated into current representational Broadway productions.

The concerns then of this study will be two: 1) to survey current directions in Interpreters Theatre based on recent articles and books in the field in order to ascertain those conventions integral to Interpreters Theatre; 2) to note their presence in current Broadway shows which are predominatly representational, assessing how effective and integral they are to the show's critical acclaim.

ESSENTIAL CONVENTIONS

To describe essential conventions the authors surveyed all of the major articles and books regarding Interpreters Theatre written since 1964. The research revealed trends, or certain "essential" conventions which recurred in many articles; a narrative element within the play written by the playwright or created by the staging of the director; minimal theatrical cues which invite an imaginative response from audiences; a general tendency to give prominence to the words or ideas of the play; a performer playing more than one character; and a creative use of offstage/onstage focus. Then the authors viewed major off and

on-Broadway productions and surveyed critiques of the productions by prominent critics. Such analysis yielded not only information regarding current trends in Interpreters Theatre, but also ascertained their presence and effectiveness in professional theatre.

CONVENTION 1

A production may incorporate "simultaneity of action," whereby performers maintain some direct contact with the audience, generally through narration which is manifested in the lyric, dramatic, or epic mode.

Robert Breen includes in his definition of Chamber Theatre a narrator who is an integral and central character, whose point of view is essential, and who leads an audience to focus on a particular character.[6] The narrator may also speak directly to the audience or to the characters who in turn may speak for themselves. King adds that the narrator serves "to distance the scenes and. . .dispel(s) the 'illusion of reality.'"[7] Through this narrator, the audience may view past scenes in the present. The narrator tells the audience a story in the past tense as the action unfolds before them in the present. Breen calls this technique "simultaneity of action." Kleinau further organizes these scenes into Aristotelian modes: lyric, in which the speaker stands in the most open relationship to the reader or audience, as if he/she were sharing thoughts and feelings directly; epic, in which a narrator speaks sometimes directly to the audience, sometimes through characters who seem to speak for themselves; and dramatic, in which the characters speak to each other.[8] Through the

narration, the audience is taken from traditional theatre's pictorial space to "acoustical space," which Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan define as having "no point of favored focus. It's a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing a thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimension moment to moment."[9]

Since it is assumed that off-Broadway is an area where one attempts the innovative and creative, it is not surprising to find the "simultaneity of action" technique in several Greenwich Village productions during the 1979-80 theatre season. One of these is Marsha Norman's Getting Out in which the main character is Arlene, a thirty year old woman who has just been released from prison. A second character, the narrator in the play, is Arlie, the teenage Arlene as she had been fifteen years earlier. The play begins with Arlie's long lyric monologue to the audience. The scene immediately shifts to a dramatic mode as Arlene is leaving her prison cell to start a new life. It is soon clear to the audience that the present is represented by Arlene, the adult, and that Arlie's scenes are occurring in a mental past. As the audience views the older Arlene in strictly dramatic, representational scenes, at the same time they are permitted to see her mental thoughts brought to life through Arlie, who delivers narrative, presentational monologues or interacts with other characters from Arlene's past.

Of the plays which began off-Broadway and later moved uptown for a Broadway run, two clearly serve as good examples of modal

variety and a mixture of pictorial and acoustical space. Lanford Wilson's Pulitzer Prize winning play, Talley's Folly, begins in pure lyric mode and is set in acoustical space. Matt Friedman, the male figure in the two-character play, steps onto the front of the stage, which is lighted in white work lights, and addresses the audience: "They tell me that we have ninety-seven minutes here tonight-without intermission. So if that means anything to anybody; if you think you'll need a drink of water or anything. . . ." Walter Kerr mentions this lengthy monologue: "Chatting informatively and most engagingly with the audience, he explains away all of the stage carpentry and lighting that make the atmosphere so romantic [the lattice-work, the louvers, a revolving spotlight that puts a sparkle on the water that isn't there], assures us that, as the dockside is arranged, the audience is really in the river, and then somehow gets on to the subject of bees."[10] With the entrance of Sally Talley, the dramatic mode begins and continues throughout the remainder of the play. At the close of the play, after Matt has wooed and won Sally's heart, he returns to the lyric mode used when the play began: "And so, all's well that ends. . . [Takes out his watch, shows time to Sally, then to audience]... right on the button. Good night."

Bernard Pomerance's The Elephant Man is a British import which played at the off-Broadway St. Peter's Church in New York before moving uptown to the Booth Theatre in April of 1979. It too utilizes the convention of simultaneity of action. Dr. Frederick Treves serves as a main character in the play and as narrator.

Early in the play he stands before the audience as an anatomy lecturer, showing actual photographic slides dating from the 1840's of the elephant man, John Merrick. As the audience listens to Dr. Treves and watches pictures of the real elephant man on a large screen, the actor who portrays Merrick stands center stage, in white light, representing another time and place, and slowly contorts himself to suggest the projected slides. Three scenes are actually occurring here simultaneously: 1) Dr. Treves is lecturing and revealing a chart of the historical elephant man to his audience, 2) the performer interpreting John Merrick is slowly developing into the elephant man, and 3) the audience members are creating in their minds a new scene, the blending of the chart and the performer into a living elephant man for this production. The entire play is a telling of a past event which the audience is permitted to witness in the present. Narrator/ Dr. Treves moves in and out of the lyric mode as he talks directly to the audience, changing scenes, moving from time period to time period, and then into the dramatic mode as he becomes a part of the story he is telling.

Possibly one of the most facinating uses of simultaneity of action occurs in Peter Shaffer's Tony Award winning play, Equus. The main action takes place in Rokeley Psychiatric Hospital in Southern England. The scenes in this setting are in the present, and the patients' stories, although acted out in the hospital setting, represent a time past. A representative scene occurs late in the play and develops into the major climax. After several

months of questioning and analyzing Alan Strang, child psychiatrist Dr. Martin Dysart is on the verge of learning why this teenage boy hideously blinded six horses. The scene represented in the present is Dr. Dysart's office, and Alan is telling of the events which preceded the deed. As he relates the story, the audience views a variety of scenes, times, and places simultaneously. In the present, Alan and Dr. Dysart are in the doctor's office discussing the past events. As Alan describes the events [past], he physically moves several steps out of the doctor's area into a new playing area with Jill, Alan's girlfriend. This area becomes a new present where he and Jill act out the story; at times he talks to the doctor in the past tense and to Jill in the present tense. There are three different dramatic modes represented here: Alan and Dr. Dysart in the present, Alan and Jill in another present, and Alan and Jill representing a past event in Dysart's and Alan's present. Following this scene Dr. Dysart addresses the audience in pure lyric mode, promising them that he will heal the boy.

Critic Edith Oliver comments on the "simultaneity of action" techniques incorporated in another Broadway production, Hugh Leonard's Da: "The action takes place in Charlie's memory, and, since memory bypasses chronology, it shuttles back and forth in time."[11] This memory play examines the theme of not being able to forget or shake parental influences. The father, affectionately referred to as Da, has just died; yet, his presence is strongly felt. The playwright identifies the place as "A kitchen, and later, places remembered," and the time as "May 1968 and, later,

times remembered." The play's use of simultaneity of action is different from that of any of the previously mentioned plays. In the present scenes, Charlie Now is haunted by memories of his dead father. These past remembrances become reality as Charlie Now watches Younger Charlie relive remembered experiences with Da. Two actors interpret Charlie at different stages in his life. Rather than a mixture of lyric, epic, and dramatic modes, this play incorporates a series of dramatic modes, generally with Charlie Now as an outside observer watching Younger Charlie and making casual comments, which one suspects are intended for the audience as much as for himself. In this respect, he might be called a narrator because he is suggesting a point of view and attitude for the audience.

These four plays, representative of the "simultaneity of action" convention, have maintained successful runs in New York theatres. They have all incorporated mixtures of Aristotle's lyric, dramatic, and epic modes, thus employing creative interpreters theatre techniques on the professional commercial stage.

CONVENTION 2

<u>A production may avoid the physicalization of conventional theatrical accoutrements and instead may create symbolic images that evoke an imaginative response on the part of the audience</u>.

As Grotowski demands of his "Poor Theatre," these productions, for the most part, have been stripped to the barest theatrical accoutrements, thus leaving the audience to complete unfinished details in its imagination. The environment, being symbolic or

non-illusionistic, does not pull the action onstage; rather, it "creates and atmosphere enhancing and aiding the action and interpretation."[12] Sound, lights, and colors are used for mood and psychological impact, while properties, makeup, and costumes are effective only as symbols. Brown, Epolito, and Stump believe that all the visual and auditory aspects of production must be "kept in the realm of suggestion" and should "not interfere with the participation, re-creation function of the listeners." The production itself becomes a synecdoche. The audience becomes a reader, and the production is a translation, or metaphor for the original text. The performers therefore only "trigger" conceptions.[13] Thus, the audience experiences Coger and White's double-vision effect: they "see the reader [performer] before them and also see the characters in action" in their imagination.[14]

The Broadway production of Strider did just that. Robert Kalfin, Artistic Director of the Chelsea Theatre Center and director of the 1980 Broadway production, Strider: The Story of a Horse, explained that when performers are "involved in the purest sense of creating illusion, the audience would have to do most of the work."[15] Critic Mel Gussow believes that with Strider, the audience succeeded. "Even more than Equus," Gussow wrote, "The production relies upon the audience's imagination." It is an "artful experience in the magic of illusion."[16] Twenty-two actors, costumed in tan, non-descript Russian peasant rags, play twenty-two different horses that change back and forth into twenty-two humans. The transformation from human to horse is done simply by the performers assuming a prancing stance and

holding a stick with streamers on one end to represent a tail. The set is equally suggestive. It consists of a pole and a rope on a bare stage. Gussow believes that the actors, along with mood lighting, evoke a time and place which brings reality to the illusion.

Because of today's higher prices in building materials, simplicity in staging is oftentimes forced on the productions. Groups like the Circle in the Square repertory company are non-profit organizations and operate primarily through public funds from arts councils and grants from corporate foundations. One of their recent productions, staged on the Circle's large thrust stage uptown, was Michael Weller's Loose Ends which requires eight separate settings, such scenes as "A beach in Bali," "A living room in Central Park," and "A cabin in New Hampshire." Director Alan Schneider wanted his actors to use the vast stage space, so set designer Zack Brown and lighting man David F. Segal filled the area with suggestive set pieces and mood lighting which created the illusion of detailed times and places. In reality, the stage was very nearly bare, but with the aid of slides representing in more detail the suggested sets which appeared on stage and mood music by Randy Newman, eight very detailed settings were created. New York Times critic Roger Copeland explained how these slides function:

> A scene takes place in Central Park in 1975. The locale is represented on stage by a pair of realistic park benches and wire-mesh trash cans. As the lights fade out on the scene, our attention is redirected to a slide

> showing us the actors caught in the very same pose they held a moment ago, surrounded by what looks like the very same scenic properties, only this time, they are situated in the real Central Park. It is almost as if the photographs are attempting to compensate for the inevitable "unreality" of the stage. . .[17]

Filling a large void is not always the problem. The stage of the Circle in the Square downtown theatre is not much larger than an average living room. Designer Tom Lynch had to economize onstage space in order to supply the necessary acting areas for John Heuer's Innocent Thoughts, Harmless Intentions, which includes a country house attic, an army barrack sleeping quarters which houses eight men, a small bar, a snowy Alaskan bus stop, and an apartment kitchen and bedroom. Another obstacle was added because the attic and the barrack quarters had to remain as permanent settings throughout the production, and scenes had to occur simultaneously in both areas. In one scene, three of the sets had to be used at once. As one would expect, the various settings blended into each other, and yet the attic and the barracks were extremely realistic. The girl, the only character to appear in the attic scenes, enters this setting through a trap door in the stage floor, creating the illusion of her entering from below. One could easily accept that the remainder of the set which surrounds this attic setting is, in fact, nothing more than the hidden alcoves of the attic. And yet, through suggestive lighting, when the army men entered onto the stage, these rear areas became a completely different time and place; in fact, the barrack

scenes occurred twenty years after the attic scenes were to have taken place. When the scene moves to the apartment complex, a barrack table in the far left corner became the kitchen table at the same time that the bed in the attic became the apartment bedroom.

Evita, a musical based on the life of Eva Peron, the second wife of the Argentine President, Juan Peron, employed many suggestive techniques also. Most of the production was staged on a bare acting area. A large screen, the background for much of the playing area, revealed real-life slides and motion pictures charting Eva's progress from prostitution to politics. Sets were represented by set pieces: a bed, a door frame, a revolving door. One of the most creatively staged scenes was a political rally which required the audience to complete the picture. The scene was played sideways with the audience viewing the behind-the-scene activities. The performers played this scene into the left wing as if the large seating area were off left, leaving the audience to complete in its imagination the filled auditorium.

John Dexter won a Tony Award for his brilliant direction of Peter Shaffer's Equus. This 1975 production may have been the return to creative staging which avoided theatrical accoutrements in favor of more simplistic and suggestive staging techniques. The set, a small square structure sitting in the middle of the stage, resembled a lecture lab. In the production, it became an operating room, paddock, meadow, country lane, living room, doctor's office, boy's bedroom, pornographic movie house,

barn, riding stables, and a sandy beach by the ocean. All of these settings were created through nothing more than suggestion through dialogue. This simple structure was surrounded by large wooden barn-like walls, a bench in the down right area of the main stage, and a spectator's gallery in which audience members sat, as did the actors, when not involved in a particular scene. The audience actually became a part of the set, as though "they'd come for a scholarly demonstration."[18] Playwright Shaffer states, "There are almost no props in the play. It's as bare as a table. I like that a lot. It exercises the imaginative muscles of the audience."[19] Symbolic and imaginative techniques were incorporated throughout the production. Eerie music and the snorts and grunting sounds of horses created the proper environment. Horses were represented by tall, male actors, clad in brown, wearing large, skeletal silver-wire horse's heads matched by high metal hooves strapped to their feet. Walter Kerr was much impressed with the simplicity of the climactic ending of Act I in which the young boy decides to ride one of the horses through the night:

> We might only have heard of this, it could have been narrated. A film would do it literally and, I think, lose intensity in the doing. Here the boy simply mounts the shoulders of one of the six shadowy figures who have from time to time during the evening slipped beneath the brooding horse masks. The hooves of the boys' alter ego begin to paw the stage floor; they are spiky silver elevations that look like inverted jeweled crowns.

> The stage floor itself begins to move, turned on its axis by the nodding, neighing horse-men at hand so that the railings at first slip by, then race by. With the exultation of the boy's passion, the increasing speed of the spinning ground, the rush of air that both seem to generate as track whirls away beneath the silver. We are left not only persuaded but spellbound by the cluttering, crying, crop-whipping, authenticity of the image.[20]

Often due to financial necessity, simplicity is the dictated means to the end. New York's commercial theatres are proving that production with minimal staging can be the most theatrically creative.

CONVENTION 3

A production may attempt to "front the text," giving prominence to the literature.

A third convention, closely aligned with the second, stems from Maclay's insistence that directors of Interpreters Theatre should strive to "front" the text. "Our purpose," she contends, "is to clarify, illuminate, extend, or provide insights into the particular literary text being presented. Naturally, then, words are the means through which action or experience is expressed."[21] To accomplish this, action is held to a minimum thereby making the focus the interplay of ideas rather than the interplay of performers. Occasionally, Brechtian techniques are used to create detachment so that the audience might assume a critical stance. Finally, scripts are chosen with regard to the evocative power of the

language rather than the referential power. As Kleinau and Hughes wrote, "Language lives in a world of ideas, emotions, and sensations rather than the exterior world of literal action.[22]

Frequently, when one cites examples of this convention, they overlap with other conventions because all conventions of Interpreters Theatre have as the supreme objective the emphasis of the script. However, here one notes that words and ideas become more important than overt action. A few examples from current off and on-Broadway productions should demonstrate the viability of this convention even in those productions of a predominantly representational nature.

Certainly Betrayal, Harold Pinter's newest play, is a case in point. Were one to scrutinize the production, he/she would certainly be aware of the conventional blocking; but if one did not go to the theatre for that purpose, he/she is most likely to leave the production unaware of the movement but still pondering weighty questions which Pinter posed throughout.

Arthur Kopit's Wings subordinates the visual to the aural. There is really very little visual significance. The play focuses on brain damage and its subsequent effect-the loss or impairment of the power to use or understand speech. Thus most of the "action" takes place in the main character's consciousness. Strider, is similar in its bareness with a stage stripped of virtually all props to direct the audience's focus to Tolstoy's words as comments on the injustices of civilization and eventually the indominatability of the human spirit.

Kleinau and Hughes' comment that "Language is more evocative than referential"[23] is nowhere more apparent than in the last act

of Bent wherein virtually the entire act is played with the two characters facing the audience communicating to one another through only powerful verbal language which tends to evoke rather than refer. The actors succeed in a sexual seduction of one another through little more than sensual language.

Perhaps no production currently on off-Broadway more clearly demonstrates the convention of "fronting the text" than does Elephant Man. The director reduces the stage to the barest and the action to a minimum in an effort to permit the audience to focus on the ideas. Even the elephant man's actions are stylized, not literal. Kerr describes them:

> Mr. Anglem's torso, stripped to a loincloth, is spastically, atwist. But he is otherwise unmarked: no scaly hide, no slobbering half-lip, no grossly over-shadowed eyeball. The theatre is asserting itself here, insisting upon its power of suggestion.[26]

Even though the action is quite moving, it is the thought, the idea, as expressed in the words of the elephant man, the doctor, the actress that we remember--in essence, that which is said rather than that which is done.

These, then, are only a few examples which demonstrate a variety of techniques designed to give prominence to the language of the script and thereby emphasize the interplay of ideas. Clearly, this convention is an integral and effective ingredient to the productions analyzed.

CONVENTION 4

In a production, a performer may play more than one character, or several performers may interpret various facets of a character simultaneously.

It was not unusual in the Greek theatre for the leading actor to play several characters throughout the production. The finest actors of the day were expected to interpret the main characters in each scene even if it meant they would play a variety of roles in one show. Joanna Maclay mentions that often in Interpreters Theatre a small number of performers will portray a larger number of characters.[24] This is also true of many Broadway musicals, and can be seen in such large cast musicals as Annie, My Fair Lady, Evita, and the current Peter Pan where the actor portraying Mr. Darling, the children's father, later plays the infamous Captain Hook. Richard Haas also included the idea of performers playing more than one role as an accepted interpreters theatre convention.[25] Several current New York productions are using this technique. At the end of Evita, the heroine, near death, mentally relives her career as Argentina's most powerful woman. Behind her appear two other actresses interpreting Evita as she had appeared earlier in other scenes from the play. Simultaneously, three Evitas appear on the stage. In another musical, Strider, nearly all of the eighteen cast members of the off-Broadway production interpret more than one role, all of them at one time in the production impersonating horses. Pamela Burrell, who played the lead female horse in the production, also interpreted three other parts: actor/Viazapurikha/Mathieu/ Marie. Critics praised this production for its theatrical ingenuity.

Off-Broadway's Getting Out and Broadway's Da incorporated this convention in another fashion. In both plays two performers interpreted one role simultaneously onstage. The audience views one character as he/she appears at two different periods of his/her life. In Da, Charlie Now, a forty year old man, looks over his past experiences with his father who enacts a series of memory scenes with Young Charlie. Arlie is the teenage Arlene in Getting Out, a play which concerns a thirty-year old woman, but examines the activities of her teenage years simultaneously. Carole Shelly won a Tony Award for Elephant Man, a play in which she and most of the other eight cast members interpreted several roles. One actor, in fact, was listed in the program as playing five different roles. Only the actor performing the role of John Merrick, the elephant man, interpreted one part.

Tom Stoppard created a different approach to this convention in Night and Day with his character of Ruth. The play script, dealing with the functions and responsibilities of journalism, makes a clear distinction between the characters of Ruth and "Ruth". Stoppard provides an explanatory note: "The audience is occasionally made privy to Ruth's thoughts, and to hers alone. When Ruth's thoughts are audible she is simply called 'Ruth' in quotes, and treated as a separate character. Thus, Ruth can be interpreted by 'Ruth'." The audience knows this early in Act I, where in the middle of a serious conversation, Ruth turned toward the audience and, as "Ruth," said to the accompaniment of piano chords, the Beatles' phrase, "Help! I need somebody - help!" The others in the scene with Ruth responded as if nothing unusual

had happened. Critic Jack Richardson made note of this interruption of character: "Miss Smith radiates a lively commentary on all the action surrounding her, making the selfish singlemindedness of her character seem at the same time penetrating and vacuous."[26]

Having an actor interpret several roles is nothing new to Broadway's large scale musicals, where keeping the cast size to a minimum may be a financial concern; yet, this technique is being incorporated more and more into conventional plays giving an indepth look at the multifaceted qualities of the characters.

CONVENTION 5

A production may incorporate creative offstage/onstage focus.

Traditionally Interpreters Theatre has used offstage focus, ostensibily for the purpose of encouraging the audience to recreate the scene in the mind's eye. A performer faces the audience, redirecting its focus to an imaginary place situated in the middle of the theatre. Theoretically, this frees the audience from realism onstage, permitting them to establish the scene in the mind's eye. In recent years, however, particularly with the advent of the Kleinaus' article on scene location, directors have used a creative combination of both onstage and offstage focus. As they wrote, "It [their viewpoint] not only questions the possibility of keeping the scene offstage, but it questions the desirability of doing so."[27] Maclay added that offstage focus tends to "universalize or generalize the experience,"[28] whereas onstage focus is reserved for realistic, specific, particular action. And the shift from one to the other is artistically employed to emphasize a particular scene or event.

Few pure examples of offstage focus can be found in professional theatre for few productions that played on and off-Broadway were Interpreters Theatre in the strictest sense. However, many examples of a variant form of offstage focus can be noted as the performers, in Coger and White's words, attempted to "develop and maintain a closer, more personalized relationship between performers and audience."[29]

In Gertrue Stein, Pat Carroll's one person show, she certainly maintained an open stance with the audience. Frequently, she invited the audience onstage with merely eye contact which made the audience members feel as if they were participants in this conversation. With equal skill Miss Carroll occasionally shifted the focus--sometimes to an imaginary place onstage, but most frequently above the heads of the audience as she talked with her brother, Alice Toklas, or Picasso. Certainly, she freed the audience's imagination encouraging each member to create his/her own characters.

Strider, presented another form of offstage focus. One heard the story from the horse's viewpoint. Thus, much of the narration was left in the adaptation permitting Strider to comment on his own actions and the actions of others. In pure chamber theatre style the focus changed rapidly from the dramatic mode which most resembles conventional theatre to the epic mode wherein Strider became a narrator. He highlighted the interesting irony already present in the script while providing the audience a dual vision--an opportunity to see scenes unfold while at the same time to hear comments upon that action as it unfolds.

In Equus, one notes the creative use of offstage and onstage focus as the director adapted the style to the ideas being treated. Most of the play was onstage focus, particularly the scenes which Alan and Dysart reconstructed from Alan's memory. Certainly the onstage focus highlighted the realistic, specific action--the particular, excruciating scenes which were a part of Alan's subconscious. Yet one saw subtle shifts in focus as Dysart lead Alan into a consideration of the implications of those events. One notes in the Dysart staging a much more open stance as he pondered the implications of Alan's acts. Then too, as Alan recounted the painful experiences which led to his blinding of the horses, one notes that his refusal to face Dysart, his gradual shift to offstage focus, was motivated by more than his inability to face his accusor squarely. Certainly, the director was aware of the subtle shift in the script from particular to universals, from specific acts to implications of those acts as he directed Alan to assume a more open stance with his audience.

Closely aligned to Equus in its use of offstage focus is Michael Cristopher's Shadow Box, which concerns terminally ill patients who attempt to deal with their illness. All of the scenes were played realistically with the director occasionally encouraging the actors to assume a more open stance in various scenes. However, in the last moments of the play the focus changed dramatically. No longer did one see a conventional drama with onstage focus; rather, the actors rose and faced the audience squarely, admonishing them to "live for the moment." Once again one notes the appropriateness of this shift in focus

to reinforce the shift in subject matter--a shift from particulars to universals. Each actor lead the audience to a consideration of the importance of life--this moment. Thus, the audience accepted the shift in focus as completely appropriate. Moreover, because of the shift, audience members were virtually confronted and thereby forced to examine their attitudes regarding death and life.

Perhaps the classic use of offstage focus in a Broadway production is found in Sherman's Bent, directed by Robert A. Ackermann. The play takes us through a series of events aimed at revealing the atrocities suffered by homosexuals during the 1930's in Germany.

The first act was conventional theatre utilizing a representational style and onstage focus. Santo Loquasto's four sets for Act I were, for the most part, realistic, perhaps selectively realistic. The fashionable Berlin apartment, the backstage dressing room, and especially a wooded area, complete with a small kindled fire and night noises, and the moving boxcar which transports Jewish prisoners to one of the concentration camps, all added a remarkable touch of realism to the production. Then in Act II, the style changes. Walter Kerr comments, "We're moved from the first act almost overcrowded with vigorous events to a second shrouded in the stillness, the senseless repetition, even the fragmented rhythms of a Samuel Beckett."[30] And yet this second act setting, a bare stage with some wire fencing across the back and two large piles of rocks down right and left, seemed appropriate, was realistically justified and

enhanced the staging tremendously. A large portion of Act II employed many offstage focus techniques, realistically explained because the men, whose job it was to carry rocks from one pile to another, were not allowed to look at each other during the work breaks, but were required to stare straight ahead. It was during these offstage focus scenes that two of the men make love to each other through vocal, verbal, and mental suggestions. Critic Jack Richardson commented on the scene: "While standing at attention, their eyes fixed on empty space in front of them, the two men find a way verbally to make love to each other that brings them both to climax, a moment that marks a small triumph for human inventiveness and imagination."[31] When mental suggestions are made, conventional visual theatrical accoutrements can only disturb and distract. During these offstage focus scenes, the viewers need to create the double-vision effect [they see the performers before them and also see the characters in action in their imagination]. Loquasto's Act II background provided the perfect realistic environment and yet did nothing to distract from the audience's contributions to the scene. This scene was a perfect blending of pictorial space and accoustical space occurring simultaneously. It moved smoothly from a representational style with onstage focus to handle the largely action scenes to a presentational, offstage focus to handle the more philosophic, idea-oriented scenes. Certainly creative on and off stage focus figured prominently in these productions and was an integral element in the show's critical acclaim.

CONCLUSIONS

Conventions of Interpreters Theatre still remain viable in professional productions both on andoff-Broadway. As Coger and White point out, "Readers Theatre is not a substitute for conventional theatre and is not intended to be."[32] Nonetheless, productions on and off-Broadway confirm that these conventions remain an integral part of even the productions that are predominantly representational. In fact, their presence in on and off-Broadway productions raised certain questions which would merit further study. Since the conventions described are indeed integral to productions and the number of productions using these conventions is significant, then perhaps instruction in interpreters theatre styles and techniques would seem increasingly important to a contemporary actor's training. Then too, one might investigate the convention's origin--is it created by the playwright and thus inherent in the script or is it a contribution of the designer or the director? One might discover not only production utilization of interpreters conventions, but also interesting alteration of dramatic form or style within certain plays. Certainly, based on recent trends, there is little reason to suspect that the importance of the conventions will diminish. One-person shows utilizing both representational and presentational conventions continue to thrive as evidenced by the success of Clarence Darrow, Eleanor Roosevelt, The Belle Of Amherst, and Give 'Em Hell Harry. Productions moving more closely to "pure Interpreters Theatre still emerge, finding receptive Broadway audience.[33] Finally, such creative directors

as Peter Brook are leading actors and audience to experience different realms of theatre based on conventions of Interpreters Theatre. Brook's latest project at La Mama offered, in repertory, four productions aimed at what he calls the "essentials"--"the stripping away of unnecessary accoutrements in an effort to reach a new simplicity directed toward a 'unity between actors, audience, and material.'"[34] And, if the critical acclaim is an indicator, he has succeeded. Gussow wrote, "Avoiding artifice, the plays draw deeply from the imagination of the director, the actors, and the audience. Together, we fill in the empty space. What Mr. Brook offers is not minimal but maximal theatre."[35] Were one not aware of the date, he/she might suspect that he/she was reading a review of John Brown's Body or Don Juan in Hell.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Keith Brooks and John Bielenberg, "Readers Theatre as Defined by New York Critics," Southern Speech Journal, Summer, 1964, pp. 288-302.

[2]See Readers Theatre Bibliography of the Speech Communication Association of America, Clark S. Marlor, Chairman.

[3]Walter Kerr, "Theatergoers Were Asked to Help Make Magic," The New York Times, December 30, 1979, sec. 2, pp. 1, 5.

[4]For the purposes of this paper the authors are using Interpreters Theatre as an inclusive term to include readers theatre, presentational theatre, and chamber theatre.

[5]Marion Kleinau and Janet McHughes, Theatres for Literature (Sherman Oaks, California: Alfred Publishing Company, 1980), p. 5.

[6]Robert Breen, Chamber Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1978), p. 4.

[7]Judy Yordon King, "Chamber Theatre by Any Other Name," The Speech Teacher, September, 1972, p. 195.

[8]Kleinau and McHughes, pp. 11-13.

[9]Ibid., p. 6.

[10]Walter Kerr, "Stage: Talley's Folley by Lanford Willson, The New York Times, February 21, 1980, sec. c, p. 15.

[11]Edith Oliver, "Foster-Father's Day," New Yorker, March 27, 1978, p. 96.

[12]Robert C. Henderhan, et. al. "A Philosophy on Readers Theatre," The Speech Teacher, September, 1963, p. 231.

[13]William R. Brown, et. al., "Genre Theory and the Practice of Readers Theatre," The Speech Teacher, January, 1974, p. 3.

[14]Leslie Coger and Melvin White, Readers Theatre Handbook (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman, Co., 1973), p. 30.

[15]Robert Kalfin, "Using Audience Imagination to Create Stage Illusion," New York Theatre Review, August/September, 1979, p. 39.

[16]Mel Gussow, "Stage: Strider: A Tolstoy Adaptation," The New York Times, July 1, 1979, sec. c, p. 7.

[17]Roger Copeland, "On Making Unreality More Real," The New York Times, August 26, 1979, sec. II, pp. 3 and 21.

[18]Walter Kerr, "A Psychiatric Detective Story of Infinite Skill," The New York Times, September 2, 1973, sec. 2, p. 1.

[19]Mel Gussow, "Shaffer Details a Mind's Journey in Equus," The New York Times, October 24, 1974, p. 3.

[20]Walter Kerr, "A Psychiatric Detective Story of Infinite Skill," p. 3.

[21]Joanna Maclay, Readers Theatre: Toward a Grammar of Practice (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 3.

[22]Kleinau and McHughes, p. 9.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Maclay, p. 5.

[25]Richard Haas, Theatres of Interpretation, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Robert Burton Publishing, 1976), p. 30.

[26]Jack Richardson, "Three From London," Commentary, March, 1980, p. 72.

[27]Marion L. Kleinau and Marvin D. Kleinau, "Scene Location in Readers Theatre: Static or Dynamic?" The Speech Teacher, September, 1965, p. 197.

[28]Maclay, p. 20.

[29]Coger and White, p. 30.

[30]Walter Kerr, "Stage: Bent, Starring Richard Gere", The New York Times, December 3, 1979, sec. b, p. 15.

[31]Jack Richardson, "Three From London," p. 74.

[32]Coger and White, p. 31.

[33]Note the warm critical responses to Colored Girls, a production composed largely of presentation selections. See: The New York Times, June 13, 1976, p. 15 and The New York Times, September 16, 1976, p. 53.

[34]Margaret Croyden, "Peter Brook's Search for Essentials," The New York Times, May 4, 1980, sec. 2, p. 5.

[35]Mel Gussow, "'Comedy, Tragedy, and Mystical Fantasy' for Peter Brook," The New York Times, May 25, 1980, sec. 2, p. 4.